



EAST SIDE EDUCATION FOUNDATION

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*The greatest thing in this world is not so much where we are,
but in what direction we are moving.*

Oliver Wendell Holmes



IN THE BEGINNING

In 2020, the East Side Education Foundation began conversations about documenting its priorities, initiatives, and history in a written document that could be used to chronicle its organizational features and establish parameters for how the organization would move forward strategically.

The world has changed, and every day we see more evidence of and support for college completion as a critical capacity for success in our increasingly globalized and complex world. At the same time, there are significant barriers still to achieving this vision for all of our children. ESEF identified this dual opportunity and challenge as a priority focus, and took action to approve the design of a plan to clearly articulate and put into action a portfolio of strategic responses.

The Strategic Planning work focused on achieving five key outcomes:

- Strengthen and build better understanding of ESEF (values, vision for the future, mission, principles), and clearly identify our organizational strategic initiatives/priorities to realize our 21st century organizational vision.
- Develop a first-level action plan for achieving our 21st century strategic goals/priorities.
- Develop a clear understanding of our roles and responsibilities, how they interconnect, and implications for individual and collective action.
- Build positive and productive relationships among the ESEF organizational leadership and partner organizations that will support successful implementation of ESEF's new strategic plan.
- Create a continued sense of urgency, and positive energy, provide opportunities to reflect, and celebrate success

THE PLANNING PROCESS



Phase 1: Leadership Takes a Stand

The strategic planning framework asks that we start with the organizational leadership taking a stand that reflects a powerful vision of student success. That means naming and branding the initiative and clearly articulating some key fundamentals that will define who the organization is and what it stands for with regard to its clients.

Whenever we start a planning process, we always want to ground the work in the current state. We need to know what IS in order for us to accurately be able to plot our path to our desired future. We did this in part by reviewing existing information contained on the ESEF website, documents, initiatives and the like, as well as engaging key leaders in conversations about related history and current plans.

Then, we convened the top level leadership to establish those key fundamentals: vision, mission, values/beliefs, principles, and strategic initiatives. What these fundamentals do is clearly articulate the future we say we want for our organization, how we will need to behave in order to walk that talk, and the big work we believe we will need to take on in order to make that future a reality. These fundamentals will guide the entire design and implementation process. The leadership signed on to the process and commits to supporting it internally and externally.

Phase 2: Engaging the Board around the Strategic Initiatives

Phase Two is about broad-based engagement of the board, ownership of the process and the results, and development of a common understanding of the vision and direction. Our strategy for doing this was to hold discussions during scheduled Board and Governance Team meetings to orient Board members to the strategic plan design process and their roles/responsibilities in that.

THE PLANNING PROCESS

Phase 3: Action Planning

Phase Three is about creating an actionable implementation plan for each strategic initiative. The Governance Team developed specific recommendations and actions for each of the identified strategic goals. These recommendations and actions defined what we would need to implement to move us from where we are currently to where we say we want to be, based on our vision statement. Because of the team's strong work, we were able to develop a plan draft based on (1) assessment of current state; (2) desired future envisioned and supported by the ESEF leadership; (3) additional contributions from others; and (4) relevant research and expertise.

In order to move the plan to action, we identified strategic initiative leads who were tasked with developing first-level common sense work plans that will allow us to live our values and passions and walk our talk. This is a commitment to do the hard work that needs to be done to move everyone along, to change the way we work, and sometimes, to change the work we do. The strategic initiative leads have main oversight responsibilities for their initiative, ensuring that timelines are met and that actions are implemented. Each initiative lead was asked to convene an action team to implement the goal recommendations/actions.

The strategic initiative leads also assessed what resources would be needed to implement their plans. The final step in this phase will be to transfer the plans to an online project management system in order to facilitate progress monitoring an efficient collaboration in the action teams and among those teams.

The draft strategic plan will be formally adopted in February 2021 at an official ESEF board meeting. The adopted plan will then be shared on the ESEF website, along with PPT and/or video orientations to the plan. Subsequently, the plan will be formally shared with partners and sponsors with the goal that different organizations and stakeholders will embrace and support different recommendations.

Phase 4: Doing the Work

Phase Four is the actual implementation, and here is where it becomes critical to have a clearly articulated organizational structure that will support and facilitate the work that needs to be done. There will be challenges because the work will be transformational – and our current organizational structures are generally designed to maintain the current state. Often, it will feel like we're having to build the plane as we fly it --inventing new structures and processes even as we're doing the work.

Currently, the strategic action leads are moving the work forward. In order to keep everyone in the loop, the strategic plan has become a standing agenda item for the Governance Team and regular Board meetings. Each strategic action lead is also working directly with a small team to:

- Build community and team and a sense of purpose and renewal.

THE PLANNING PROCESS

- Strengthen calibration within and across teams, cohesion of the work as a whole across the district, and the professional learning and competency of the team members.
- Monitor and assess progress on the implementation plan and adjust as necessary.
- Troubleshoot and plan for the work ahead.

Phase 5: Reflection/Praxis

Phase Five – the framework’s final phase – is really about adopting a growth mindset anchored in deep reflection that leads to action. It’s a recursive phase in that it doesn’t just happen at the end; rather reflection and synthesis opportunities are built into the work at every stage. This phase is a reminder to make our work transparent to the larger community and to engage the community in periodic assessments of how things are progressing and what, if any, larger scale course corrections may be needed. One thing to note is that this phase can also lead back to Phases Three or Four, depending on the results of those reflections and assessments.

As a regular accountability protocol, at least twice a year, the Board will hear about the status of each of their major actions or recommendations: Is it work that’s building, or that’s reached its peak? If it’s work that’s peaked, is it now winding down, being sustained, or possibly building to a new level?

Progress is plotted and discussions are held about and how and what now.

A second accountability protocol is the use a reflection and debriefing protocol called the After Action Review to reflect on our experiences in this work so far and to determine next steps. The protocol has three key questions:

- First, what happened.? What did we actually do/accomplish?
- Second, what insights have emerged or are emerging for us regarding our work and our role and responsibility in ensuring success for the action teams?
- Third, given these insights, what specific things will we commit to doing/ contributing as Board members?



NAMING OUR PLAN

As the East Side Education Foundation Board of Directors moved forward in designing this strategic plan, we also began to consider a compelling name for the new plan. Names matter. A name can serve several key purposes. It can provide insight into the nature or intent of a project, even while it's still being conceptualized. It makes a project real, memorable, and recognizable. A good name can facilitate communication about the project, and support people connecting to and developing ownership of the project.

As a Board, we reflected on what we should name our new plan. What sort of name would resonate with our partners and clients? What would communicate the most powerful message about this plan? What name would be most likely to engage the broadest sector of our community? Then, we took the results of that reflection and voted on our best choice for a name. And so East Side ASPIRES was born: Academic Success through Partnerships for Innovations, Resources, Equity, and Sustainability.

The dictionary defines ASPIRE as to long for or seek ambitiously, be eager for, aim for, strive for, endeavor, or hope, especially for something of great or high value. ASPIRE also has been used in the past to mean to rise up, soar, lift, or ascend. Significantly, all of these synonyms encompass a sense of struggle and remind us that anything of value or worth often requires work, effort, and struggle. These are all powerful metaphors that give nuance and context to our intent in naming our plan East Side ASPIRES.

As part of our plan name, we communicate that we, as a partnership, ASPIRE to great things for our students, our educators, our community. We commit to the necessary struggle to achieve what our students deserve. We commit to doing whatever is necessary through sustained effort, creative spirits, enduring optimism and belief, and a sense of full engagement in the task before us.

We make our commitment personal, and we equate this work with East Side ASPIRES. Through implementation of the new plan, we are making a commitment to our students and our community to go beyond what exists today to create an educational support system much more reflective of the way the world has changed over time. We are using the positive associations that exist with ASPIRE to communicate something vital about what's at the heart of our plan: that we commit to being in positive, trusting, and esteemed relationship with our community in order to find, create, and provide whatever might be needed to build our East Side students' capacities, and that commitment will yield positive outcomes for our students and our communities. This is a metaphor in action.



BEYOND THE PLAN

This strategic plan calls for the design of actionable implementation, with diverse and interdependent teams taking responsibility for moving the work forward so that progress is continuous until the big goal is achieved. The implementation must operate within a structure that facilitates coordination of the work, that empowers team leads and members to take action, that expects teams to regularly assess their progress and process and adjust as necessary, and that places their work in the public eye so that the community feels a part of the work and feels ownership of the results.

Our journey to organizational transformation unfolds as we believe that large-scale success is possible, envision clearly that success, and then strive to create that success for East Side students by inspiring 21st century achievement as described in the East Side Union High School District graduate profile.